

CITATION

COOPERATIVE CONSERVATION AWARD

TAVITA TOGIA

In recognition of Tavita Togia's unparalleled accomplishments collaborating with locals, nonprofits, Government agencies, and others to eradicate invasive species in American Samoa.

One of the most urgent environmental problems facing American Samoa today is the rapid spread of invasive plant species across its steep island landscape. These species grow and spread rapidly and outcompete native forest species, threatening the structure and function of the rainforest ecosystem, which contains many species found nowhere else on earth. Mr. Tavita Togia, a native Samoan who serves as the only terrestrial biologist for the small and remote National Park of American Samoa, recognized this closing window of opportunity and took action. Understanding the impossibility of success without collaboration, Mr. Togia has teamed with villagers, their traditional Village Councils, non-Government donor organizations, local agencies, and the National Park. He personally initiated a long-term program on the Island of Tutuila to eradicate *Falcataria moluccana*, the most noxious invasive tree species, locally called the tamaligi. Approximately 35 percent of the forested lands on Tutuila Island (the main island in the territory) have been invaded by the tamaligi. Mr. Togia and his crew of volunteers, seasonal staff, and village workers girdled every large tamaligi seed tree across more than 1,000 acres of infested forest, over 2,000 trees in total.

Mr. Togia distinguishes himself through his leadership and initiative, ability to identify cooperative solutions, hands-on participation in field activities, educational outreach efforts, and especially his work with the local Samoan community. He has created a cooperative model of how to work with villagers to accomplish conservation projects within a Samoan context—a winning combination of listening to, and working with, the traditional village leaders, establishing common goals, engaging active participation by local villagers, and motivating people to action.

For his leadership and dedication to the collaborative conservation of rainforests in American Samoa, Tavita Togia is granted the Cooperative Conservation Award of the Department of the Interior.

Secretary of the Interior